

# How Convicts Escape Sing Sing, Leaving Dummies Behind

By Edward T. Kavanaugh

WHEN John McAllister, the young Bronx burglar, escaped from Sing Sing the other night he left behind, in his cell, a startling likeness of himself in the form of a dummy.

There was nothing new in that. In the last fifty years an even dozen "guests" of Sing Sing have decamped by means of a similar stratagem. But McAllister, having something of the artist and something of the sculptor in him, bequeathed to the warden a counterfeit prisoner most unusual. In the memory of the oldest citizen of the little city of Ossining no dummy close guarded by a keeper through the long watches of the night ever was so deceptive. It had McAllister's nose, his hair, and even his Adam's apple.

James Jackson, state detective, retired recently after forty-five years of prison service, remembers the majority of these dummy escape cases. More than once he has observed a keeper inexpressibly humiliated to find that overnight his prisoner had changed from blood to straw—or even paper, sand and brick.

Women have turned the trick as effectively as men—Kate Connolly, a chronic jailbreaker, for example. She modelled a stuffed figure that fooled the guards and gave her a good start on November 27, 1869, when she made one of her unlawful exits from the old female prison at Sing Sing.

Much as Warden Edward V. Brophy regrets McAllister's disappearance, he can console himself that other wardens, older and more experienced than he, have been fooled more.

There was Warden Gaylord B. Hubbell. While serving a second term he had two images left him by James Brady and William Miller, bank burglar and highwayman, respectively. Of the dozen "dummy transactions" Sing Sing has had, this is the only "double-header."

Augustus A. Brush, who reigned the longest of any of the prison's wardens, lost two prisoners in separate breaks by the trick, and nearly parted with a third in like fashion. Addison Johnson, next to Brush in length of service as warden of Sing Sing, had a choice bit of stage property in the form of a dummy slipped to him.

## Any Warden at All

In working the dummy ruse on wardens the artful runaways have fooled severe, old-system penologists and new-idea reformers alike. They showed no favoritism between Warden Russell, who did not pet them, and Professor Kirchwey, who did. They deceived them both.

Only those familiar with prisons understand how difficult it is to prevent a convict escaping by stuffing a figure in his cell. Counting or guarding an effigy, in mistake for a human being, seems foolish. The layman is under the impression, when he reads of a convict getting away and leaving the keepers a stuffed figure, that he went to much pains to play a joke on the prison management. This is wrong.

Jailbreakers are not ordinarily joke-smiths. Their only object is to gain their freedom. If they model a dummy it is because it plays a very vital part in the plot to get out. Dummy making is a prison art that is hazardous and must be secretly done. Discovery of a dummy in his cell usually means solitary confinement for the prisoner or indictment for attempted jailbreaking. Possession of a dummy inside a prison is punished with the same severity as the carrying of burglar's tools on the outside. As the cells are officially inspected once or twice a day, an inmate making one runs a grave risk of being found out.

Sing Sing has a peculiarity which permits an effigy to work wonders. This is explained partly by the fact that there is no wall on one side. The Hudson River waterfront of the old bastille is not walled off. Between the prison yard and the river there is only a rickety iron fence about seven feet high and easily scaled. For an escape the water route affords the easiest way out.

During the day, when prisoners are in the yard, armed sentries pace back and forth on the dock outside the iron fence. More guards, with long range repeating rifles, keep vigil in the watch towers atop the twenty-foot walls to the north and south. From there they can sweep the dock if they have to open fire. These rifles awe the most desperate criminal who would like to vault the fence and try a swim for freedom.

## How It Works

Shortly after the convicts finish their day's toil they go in from the prison yard. They pass within the mess hall for the evening meal. The rest of the night they must stay indoors. They may go about the mess hall, chapel, dormitory and cell block, all connected

## The Sensational Getaway of John McAllister, Who Substituted a Marvellously Life-like Stuffed Figure, Recalls Many Successful Attempts in the Past

by corridors. But they are securely barred and locked within.

From mess the convicts go to the cell block at 7 o'clock for the count. This is to discover absentees. Each man is supposed to be in his cell and be checked. A similar tally is taken at 10 o'clock, when the prisoners retire to their cells for the night. This is done by guards moving along the galleries and looking into each cell through the crisscross lattice in the top of the heavy steel door.

If an inmate is to escape two problems confront him—first, to cheat the count, and, second, to hide in the yard. The only way to accomplish the first is to be counted by proxy—that is, leave an image in the cell that will fool the keepers checking up. Usually the prisoner absents himself from his work in the afternoon after he feels sure his cell has been given its daily examination. He goes into it, hastily constructs and lays out the bogus "prisoner." Once he has it planted he shuts his cell door and repairs to the prison yard.

He then executes the rest of the plot. He stows away somewhere within the prison yard and awaits the departure of the sentries from the towers on the walls. They are called off at 10:30 o'clock at night if no prisoner is missed. The supposition is that there is no need of further guarding the outside of the prison. The cells have all been securely locked in the block. Theoretically no prisoner should gain access to the yard during the night if the keepers indoors do their duty.

The dummy maker can now emerge from his hiding. If the guards are not sent into the yard to search for him he knows the keepers have secured all the cells and will not open them again until breakfast time. They will guard and count the effigy all night.

## Now Comes Daring

The stowaway's wit has carried him so far. Now he must rely on his daring. There are two armed watchmen somewhere around the prison yard. There is little chance, however, that he will run afoul of them. The yard and dock are lighted, but not brilliantly. He can keep tabs on the watchmen's movements and then slip past them.

He has ample opportunity now to shin over the wall, provided he is a good climber, or can get a rope, ladder or some other contrivance to facilitate his ascent. Or, more easily, he can vault the fence, drop into the Hudson and swim around the walls to the shore outside.

He can be miles away before the prison populace turns out of the cell block at 6:45 in the morning. The lineup in front of the cells before breakfast first reveals to the dumfounded keepers that one of the "jailbirds" has flown, and that the figure they thought was his, and they counted all night, is really a dummy.

What makes it hard to distinguish between a genuine prisoner and a stuffed resemblance of him in Sing Sing is the ancient type of dingy stone cells. Each is virtually a tomb. They are all incased in stone, except the steel door with the lattice in the top. This is the only opening. It affords but a poor view of the inside from the gallery. The keeper looking in to count the occupant is handicapped.

When it is borne in mind that hundreds of prisoners are repeatedly counted, day in and day out, night after night, it isn't any wonder that even a watchful guard counts a dummy which corresponds in size and general appearance to the culprit he is accustomed to seeing.

The dummy recently fashioned by McAllister, the young Bronx burglar, is a gem. As a work of art every one who has seen it agrees with Warden Brophy that it is a masterpiece. McAllister made it to his own image and likeness. He stuffed trousers, coat, stockings and shoes with paper, cardboard and other filling. He stole dough and soap and moulded a head, with features, profile and even the prominent Adam's apple of his own throat. Being an artist and sculptor, he went too far to complete the deception.

When he had transplanted some of his own hair and made a bushy crop on the crown of the model's head, he stuck on eyelashes and a slight growth of beard. Then he took his paintbrush and touched up the cheeks. When he was through, the dummy's face had a rosy tint like his own complexion. The latest getaway is the only instance where a prisoner made



John McAllister and his dummy

a head for an image. In another case the fugitive used a wax head some one gave him.

The prison staff thought McAllister so skillfully reproduced himself in the image that Warden Brophy had Bertillon Officer Louis Powers, who "mugs" the men sent to Sing Sing for the prison rogues' gallery, officially photograph it. The institution will always have something to remember McAllister by.

Kate Connolly was an arch-swindler and shoplifter. When but sixteen she

learned the art—for art it is—of jailbreaking in getting away from Blackwell's Island prison by floating across the East River on a gate. The wintry day she left Warden Henry C. Nelson the dummy stuffed with cloth she stole from the laundry of the Sing Sing females' prison, she stowed away on the roof until early morning. Then she slid down a lightning rod to the ground and made off.

Recaptured four years later, she saw another opportunity to flee on May 8, 1875. The prison was short of guards

because Warden Walker had sent out men to try to recapture five convicts who held up Engineer Dennis Cassin's freight train, forced him at the muzzle of a revolver to jump off, and then escaped on the stolen locomotive. Kate, in the confusion, again gained the roof in the night. In making her getaway this time she varied the manner of descent. She slid down a rope.

A storm was raging on the Sunday night of October 18, 1873, when Brady and Miller, in adjoining cells, made two images. They used excelsior and

paper to pad the suits of convicts' stripes they doffed for civilian clothes left outside the cell block. The one a bank robber, the other a bandit, and both powerful and desperate, they made a formidable combination. When they had stuffed their cages, they got out of them by using a false key. From the gallery they spanned the distance to the nearest window in the cell-block wall with their bunkboards. With a powerful jackscrew they pried apart the bars of the window, squeezed through and escaped by a sheer drop to the ground.

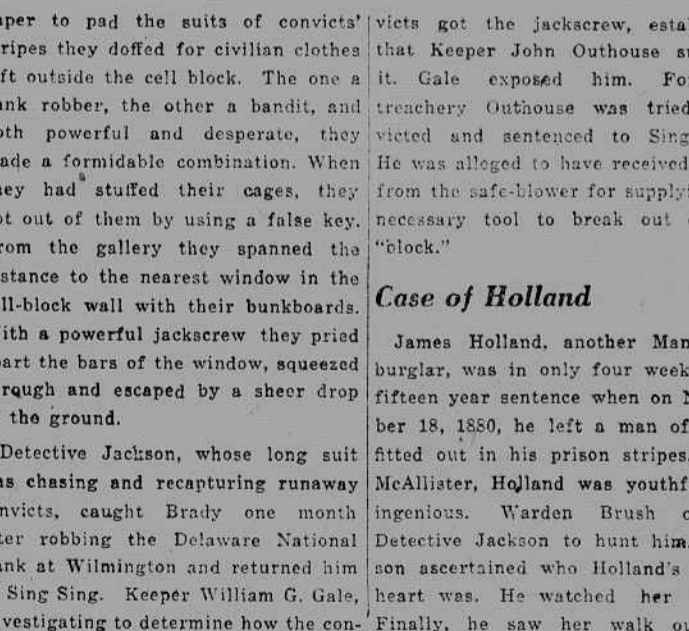
Detective Jackson, whose long suit was chasing and recapturing runaway convicts, caught Brady one month later robbing the Delaware National Bank at Wilmington and returned him to Sing Sing. Keeper William G. Gale, investigating to determine how the con-

victs got the jackscrew, established that Keeper John Outhouse supplied it. Gale exposed him. For his treachery Outhouse was tried, convicted and sentenced to Sing Sing. He was alleged to have received \$2,000 from the safe-blower for supplying the necessary tool to break out of the "block."

## Case of Holland

James Holland, another Manhattan burglar, was in only four weeks of a fifteen year sentence when on November 18, 1880, he left a man of straw fitted out in his prison stripes. Like McAllister, Holland was youthful and ingenious. Warden Brush ordered Detective Jackson to hunt him. Jackson ascertained who Holland's sweetheart was. He watched her house. Finally, he saw her walk out. He

Jean Kirsher and the dummy he left behind in 1916



trilled her down town, cross town and back up town. She returned to the house. He waited patiently. When she came out again, Jackson followed. By a roundabout route she reached A. T. Stewart's department store. She stepped into the doorway and there was the escaped convict. He kissed her. Jackson slapped a heavy hand, from which dangled a set of opened handcuffs, on his shoulder. "Jackson!" exclaimed Holland. "I'll do fifteen straight for this, dear." The girl wept as Holland and Jackson walked away.

Charles Courday left a dummy for Warden Russell to remember him by when he decamped on the night of October 31, 1870. It was Halloween and as celebrators outside of prison were playing pranks Courday thought he would play one too. The white stripes of his own uniform he colored with lamp black, squeezed out a window and slid down a rope.

James Finn, twenty-six years old, who had only two months more of a five year sentence for robbery in Brooklyn, afterward rued the day he stuffed a figure in his cell and fled from Warden Addison Johnson. Keeper John O'Keefe, on the morning of February 9, 1900, broke the news to the warden, that he had counted the dummy of straw, waste paper and rags all night, imagining it was Finn. In the interim Finn had lifted the door of his cell off its hinges in the female prison building, sneaked along the gallery and stole out through the skylight. Warden Johnson ordered seventy-six convicts immediately taken out of the female prison until it could be made "escape-proof."

Jackson trapped Finn in New York in just two days, took him to White Plains, had him indicted, convicted of jailbreaking and given four years more for taking his unauthorized vacation.

George Lavery, a "lifer" who had served ten years, formed some discarded uniforms into a dummy and propped it up in his cage on the night of December 20, 1882. By stowing away in the storehouse he was able to get into the yard after the guards were taken off the walls. Procuring a ladder, he easily mounted the north wall and dropped to safety on the outside. Warden Brush suspended every keeper on his gallery.

William Francis on the morning of January 27, 1871, left a choice bit of stage property to impersonate him in his cell in the block. He had served only a few weeks of a twenty year sentence. Somebody had smuggled in to him the wax head of a clothing-store window-dressing model. He added a torso, arms and legs and there costumed the bogus prisoner in his prison stripes. Shortly after Warden Russell dispatched guards to search for him a night watchman at Tarrytown saw fresh tracks in the snow. He followed them and dragged the escaped convict, wearing stolen overalls and jumper, out from a pile of shavings.

## Wilson's Odd Proxy

The proxy left by John Wilson, alias Paddy Barry, a Brooklyn robber, was not of the soft, collapsible type. He made an unusually stiff image. He filled a striped uniform with sand, sawdust, wood shavings and steel flour. When the guards shook the legs of the occupant on the morning of October 14, 1899, it did not fall a piece as do so many dummies. In fact, it took the combined efforts of three burly keepers to carry out the heavy figure, lift it over the gallery railing and let it drop to the stone floor five stories below. Warden Nelson unceremoniously bounced the keeper who was on Wilson's gallery that night.

Michael Toomey vanished from the cell block March 21, 1873. There was a stuffed occupant left to represent him and foil the guards in his absence but Warden Hubbell believed he was stowed away in the yard. Later the fugitive, who had hidden under the shoe shop floor, found the heat of the steam pipes too much to endure. He emerged from his hiding and was captured. The remainder of his sentence he was encumbered with a ball and chain.

Principal Keeper James Connaughton, on November 19, 1883, called out Joseph Weille, about to give the prison the "absent treatment," from his cell. With a pair of pants, shoes, stockings and a coat he had made a dummy and was just about to begin moulding the head from a quantity of smuggled dough when the jailer interfered. The effigy was confiscated and Weille was left in a dark cell several days.

## A Droll Dummy

The prison is still laughing over the flight of Jean Kirsher from former Warden George W. Kirchwey, the most regularly penologist Sing Sing has ever had. Jean went out January 12, 1916, leaving in his wake a propped-up figure, with outstretched arms, clasping a newspaper. The newspaper observed from the guards' view the lack of a head, which Kirsher did not take the trouble to make. His foot work, however, was superb. He made a well-proportioned set of legs, with ankles and feet costumed in silk hosiery and a new pair of oxfords. He crossed the legs. What the keepers saw would satisfy the average person that the prisoner was lying down, with his legs crossed, reading the day's news.

When Warden Kirchwey was told of the souvenir Kirsher left him he ordered it photographed and preserved. Last heard of, the headless "prisoner" was still kept in an old dark cell as an illustration to prison visitors of the trickery prison officials have to combat when an ingenious prisoner makes up his mind he will be going.

## Amelia Bingham Cuts the Actors' Equity Association

UNIONS may be all right for laundry workers, conductorettes, women whose lives are all bound round by machinery, whose livings must be gained from manual labor, but for the actress, the artist—never, declares Amelia Bingham, noted actress and theatrical manager, who has resigned from the Actors' Equity Association because, as she declares, the union rules were becoming not only too stringent, but altogether too personal.

In plain words Mrs. Bingham asserts: "It's nobody's business who I sign with for next season, how many hours I rehearse, how much time I choose to give to performances, or what salary I am earning. This is what I mean when I say that the union's zeal to 'care for us and help us' is getting too personal."

Thus far, William Gillette, known as the "never-has-been-interviewed" actor, is the only other Broadway light who has "seceded from the union." Mr. Gillette was caught unawares during the week and gave, via telephone, what his press agent declares is the longest, if not the only, interview he ever gave. It

consisted of just seven words and was an answer to a query as to whether he had "seceded." This is what he said: "I didn't like them, so I quit." The "them" refers to the Actors' Equity Association, the same with which Mrs. Bingham has severed relations. Mr. Gillette would make no further statement.

In talking over her action, Mrs. Bingham said: "It's a little too much, just when your thoughts are floating seaward and your eyes are casting about for the mountains, and you're beginning to 'vacation-in-your-mind,' to have a peremptory missive waylay you on a warm June morning demanding answers to the above-mentioned questions."

Mrs. Bingham harbors no resentment toward the association. In fact, she believes much good may come of it to younger members of the profession who may find that the union rules will assure them jobs and straighten out their grievances by way of the association lawyer, who, it is said, has been engaged for this purpose.

"But for an established artist, this bickering over red tape, fuss over details, argument and struggle to abide by a lot of nonsensical rules only dampens her enthusiasm, lessens her output and detracts from the message she has to give."

"I, for one, do not like to deal with my profession—my art—in this commercial way." (Mrs. Bingham always says the word art very reverentially and with closed eyes.) "No grievances that I may feel are enough to call forth such medicine as a union and a lot of rules. Bernhard and Mrs. Davenport got along without them. The most noted of the actors and actresses of the present day have found them unnecessary in the past."

"What the association and all individuals in the profession should be worrying themselves about is new plays, the fostering and encouraging of new playwrights and the eternal search for parts. Many people think we have not the great men and women on the stage to-day we had in the past. We have. There is marvellous talent. What we want is plays. There are no parts to-day like those that made the old-timers famous. The public is not long going to be satisfied with the

light stuff that has been handed out recently. The risqué touch that has been appended to all the Broadway 'nits' of recent date will soon lose its fascination."

With altruistic fervor, Mrs. Bingham declares that the tragedies of the last four years, which have sobered us, have planted their seed in deep soil and are about to bring forth fruit. That fruit, she says, will be a returning to the things that count, even a reaching out for a better, a higher grade of plays than we have ever had.

Whatever new rulings have been made by the Actors' Equity Association, from which Amelia Bingham and William Gillette have resigned, were provided, according to Frank Gilmore, executive secretary of the association, with a view to protecting the interests of the individual players.

The clause which seems to have stirred up some apprehension on the part of a number of the members calls for extra pay for all perform-

ances in excess of eight each week. Mr. Gilmore says this was deemed beneficial for the reason that recently holiday theatricals to the number of two or three extra a week have often been given without any extra pay for the actor's extra work.

Four weeks of free rehearsals for dramatic productions and six weeks for musical comedies, with any number over these paid at the rate of half salary, is another thing won for the actor by the equity contract. Formerly, says Mr. Gilmore, a person could try out for six, eight and ten weeks at free rehearsals, fail to win a part, and get no money whatever for services.

A week's notice must be given a company prior to the termination of an engagement. Individuals whose services are no longer desired or needed receive two weeks' notice, which allows time for search for another position.

There are a number of lesser clauses included in the new contract, all of which Mr. Gilmore believes will help to put the theatrical profession on a more businesslike basis.